



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

ELEVEN CHARGED IN MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR MARIJUANA SMUGGLING ENTERPRISE

SEATTLE — Eleven Seattle area residents are in custody today following the break up of a drug trafficking ring suspected of distributing as much as 500 pounds of marijuana a week throughout the United States.

Today's arrests are the culmination of a year-long investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) that led to the seizure of more than \$1.8 million in drug proceeds.

According to court papers, the drug ring was spearheaded by Long Van Nguyen, 38, of Tacoma and Nghia Pham, 36, of Auburn. Authorities say the two men used numerous couriers to transport and distribute large quantities of marijuana to customers in Washington and beyond.

Others charged in the case are:
Nhat Hoang Tran, 35, of Kent;
Tai Ngoc Nguyen, 35, of Kent;
Tai Van Truong, 30, of Tacoma;
Binh Tran, 28, of Tacoma;
Hung Chi Nguyen, 38, of Kent;
Jessica Tran, 37, of Kent;
Angie To, 36, of Auburn;
Hung Ngoc Le, 40, of Seattle;
Hoa Pham, 34, of Seattle.

During the investigation, agents discovered the marijuana was being brought into the United States from Canada in hidden compartments in commercial tractor-trailer rigs. Money couriers then smuggled the proceeds from the sale of the marijuana back across the border into Canada.

The sales of the multi-pound quantities of marijuana took place at a number of public locations, including stores, hotels, restaurants, and even outside a public library. In one instance agents seized more than \$1.4 million in currency that a co-conspirator was transporting to a storage locker in Kirkland, Washington.

According to the charging document, the conspirators laundered some of the proceeds from the drug trafficking by purchasing homes and other assets in the Seattle area. Two of the suspects registered construction companies with the State of Washington, but investigators never saw them do any construction work. One co-conspirator claimed to be receiving a salary from one of the construction firms of more than \$6,000 per month.

All but three of the defendants appeared in U.S. District Court in Seattle today and, at the request of the government, will remain in custody pending a further review. The suspects are charged with Conspiracy to Import and Distribute more than 1,000 Kilograms of Marijuana, a charge that carries a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years and a maximum sentence of life in prison. The defendants are also charged with Conspiracy to Engage in Money Laundering, which is punishable by up to 20 years in prison.

DEA and ICE are continuing their investigation. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Ye-Ting Woo and Susan Roe.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security.